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Preparation of the 2009 *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development*

Note by the Secretary-General

Summary

In its resolution 59/248, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to update the *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development* for consideration at its sixty-fourth session. The present note contains information regarding the preparation of the Survey.

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I. Background

1. In its resolution 35/78, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare a comprehensive, detailed outline for a multisectoral and interdisciplinary world survey on the role of women in overall development, taking into account the relevant recommendations of the 1980 World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women, held in Copenhagen, as well as the results of the relevant United Nations conferences on development issues, and to report thereon to the Assembly at its thirty-sixth session. The world survey was to be prepared in close collaboration with appropriate agencies of the United Nations system and in consultation with the Commission on the Status of Women.[1] The first *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development* was published in 1986.[2]

2. In its resolution 40/204, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to update the *World Survey* on a regular basis, focusing on selected emerging development issues that have an impact on the role of women in the economy at the local, national, regional and international levels. Subsequently, *World Surveys* were submitted to the Assembly in 1989, 1994, 1999 and 2004.[3] The most recent *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development*, in 2004, focused on women and international migration and presented key issues on labour migration and the rights of migrant women, refugees and displaced persons, as well as trafficking of women and girls.

3. The General Assembly, in its resolution 59/248, requested the Secretary-General to update the *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development*, noting that the survey should continue to focus on selective emerging development themes that have an impact on the role of women in the economy at the national, regional and international levels. At its sixtieth session, the Assembly decided that the theme for the sixth survey would be "Women's control over economic resources and access to financial resources, including microfinance".[4]

4. The present note by the Secretary-General serves to inform the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-third session about the preparation of the *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development*, which will focus on the theme "Women's control over economic resources and access to financial resources, including microfinance", to be submitted to the General Assembly at its sixty-fourth session in 2009.

II. Preparation of the *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development*

5. The Division for the Advancement of Women is proceeding with the preparation of the *World Survey* through a consultative process with United Nations entities in the context of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality, as well as in cooperation with other divisions within the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the regional commissions.

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[1] See General Assembly resolutions 36/74 and 36/127.

[2] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.86.IV.3.

[3] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.89.IV.2, A/49/378, A/54/227 and A/59/287.

[4] Resolution 60/210, para. 38.

6. An expert consultation on the theme "Women's control over economic resources and access to financial resources, including microfinance" was organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women in Bangkok from 12 to 14 November 2008, hosted by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). The meeting provided the opportunity for experts to discuss the topic and provide guidance and recommendations that will serve as a basis for the further elaboration of the *World Survey*. It also provided the opportunity for contributions by United Nations entities both prior to and during the expert consultation, including the Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, ESCAP, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). The Asian Institute of Technology (a partner of IFAD) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) also participated in the expert consultation.

7. A further expert consultation will be held in February 2009 to support the preparation of the *World Survey*. Experts and representatives of United Nations entities will be invited to participate in that meeting.

III. Issues to be addressed in the *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development*

8. The *World Survey* will address women's control over economic resources and access to financial resources, including microfinance, within the broad framework of the economic empowerment of women. There is increasing recognition that women's economic empowerment is a key strategy for economic development. Increased access to and control over resources and opportunities for women not only improve the economic status of women themselves and their households and communities, but also create a multiplier effect for economic growth. On the other hand, the lack of economic empowerment for women both jeopardizes growth and poverty reduction and leads to, inter alia, less favourable education and health outcomes for women and their children and greater risks of HIV/AIDS[5] and violence for women and girls.[6]

9. The potential impact of a number of ILO Conventions[7] and international human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which contain provisions promoting women's economic empowerment, will be examined. The manner in which States can systematically

[5] "Gender equality as smart economics: a World Bank Group gender action plan (fiscal years 2007-10)", September 2006.

[6] A/61/122/Add.1, para. 87.

[7] ILO has adopted a number of Conventions of particular relevance to gender equality, four of which are the key gender equality Conventions: the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156) and the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183).

and effectively utilize these instruments to overcome the barriers to women's economic empowerment will be explored.

10. The *World Survey* will address some of the key constraints that have hindered progress in achieving women's economic empowerment. Lack of legal provisions guaranteeing the economic rights of women, coupled with customary laws that discriminate against them with regard to inheritance rights, hinder women's economic empowerment and are major factors in their vulnerability to poverty. Discrimination against women in the labour market and lack of adequate access to education, training and technology also constrain their economic empowerment. Stereotypical attitudes, traditional practices, and the unequal division of labour between women and men at the household level can exacerbate women's unequal access to and control over economic and financial resources.[8] Because of women's limited access to decision-making in policymaking bodies, economic policies and strategies are often not gender-sensitive and can exacerbate women's unequal access to economic resources and opportunities. The *World Survey* will also explore the constraints to women's economic empowerment resulting from emerging issues, such as climate change and the food and energy crises.

11. The *World Survey* will identify opportunities for and constraints and challenges to women's economic empowerment at the micro, meso and macro levels, as well as the interlinkages between the levels. The linkages between economic and social policies at different levels and their impact on women's economic empowerment will be discussed. The impact of the changes in the global economic environment, such as the growing interdependence of economies and the current financial crisis, will be explored.

12. In some regions, men migrate to seek work, leaving women behind with sole responsibility for agricultural production, in the context of limited legal protection and rights to property ownership.[9] Women who remain behind when their husbands or children migrate can assume new roles and responsibility for decisions affecting the social and economic well-being of their families. Migration can empower women, but can also subject them to exploitation and gender-based violence.[10] Increasing urbanization has intensified the competition between rural and urban areas for scarce resources, such as water.[11] In Latin America, women's limited access to water for household use and irrigation has a negative impact on their productivity.[12]

13. The impact on women's empowerment of policies covering a wide range of areas, including agriculture, migration, urbanization and trade, will be evaluated in order to identify the types of policies and programmes that are conducive to women's economic empowerment. Although women make a major contribution to agricultural production, for example, their contribution is underreported in all developing regions because women's work is often unrecognized or is considered

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[8] UNDP, *Innovative Approaches to Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment*, 2008, p. 12.

[9] World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and IFAD, *Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook*, 2008, p. 1.

[10] *2004 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Women and International Migration* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.04.IV.4), pp. iii and 2.

[11] World Bank, FAO and IFAD, op. cit., p. 368.

[12] Soledad Parada, "Rural women in Latin America and their access to economic resources", expert paper prepared for the United Nations expert consultation, 2008.

part of household work.[13] Trade policies that promote cash crops and prioritize export-oriented growth usually benefit men, who predominate in these areas, and further marginalize women.[14] In some cases, men may take over crops traditionally raised by women when such crops are commercialized.[15]

14. Trade policies can have diverse effects on financial resources for gender equality, creating both opportunities and constraints through their impact on employment, income and prices. Trade can create employment opportunities for women in countries that export labour-intensive manufactured goods, but may also lead to unemployment for women if declines in prices force local industries to shut down or lay off workers.[16] For the majority of poor women in sub-Saharan Africa, diversification into trade has not helped them move out of poverty.[17]

15. The ways in which public finance management can ensure that resources are allocated to promote women's economic empowerment will be examined. The formulation of budgets at the local, provincial and state levels, for example, can have direct and indirect impacts on women's access to economic and financial resources. On the revenue side, tax systems can affect women's access to the labour market by influencing how women and men allocate their time to formal, informal and unpaid work.[18] On the expenditure side, resources can be allocated to enhance the productive capacity of women and to support their access to markets. Since women tend to have shorter work histories in the formal sector, because of interruptions for childcare and early retirement, and also have lower wages than men, they may not benefit fully from social security and social welfare measures. Women are, for example, likely to earn smaller pensions than men.[19]

16. The *World Survey* will consider official development assistance (ODA) as a critical mechanism for the economic empowerment of women. ODA funding for the empowerment of women has been directed mostly to the social sectors, mainly health and education, with limited funds allocated to areas such as agriculture, infrastructure and finance.[20] In addition to allocating funds to economic sectors, the systematic incorporation of gender perspectives in all ODA sectors is essential to increase women's access to and control over resources.

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[13] *Women 2000 and Beyond: Rural Women in a Changing World: Opportunities and Challenges*, United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2008, p. 9.

[14] Zo Randriamaro, *Gender and Trade: Overview Report* (BRIDGE, Brighton, 2006).

[15] Sarojini Ganju Thakur, "Towards women's economic empowerment — enhancing women's control over economic resources", expert paper prepared for the United Nations expert consultation, 2008, p. 8.

[16] *1999 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Globalization, Gender and Work* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.99.IV.8), pp. 12-13.

[17] Ann Whitehead, "The gendered impacts of liberalisation policies on African agricultural economies and rural livelihoods", background paper for the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) report *Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World*, 2005.

[18] Diane Elson, *Budgeting for Women's Rights: Monitoring Government Budgets for Compliance with CEDAW*, UNIFEM, 2006, pp. 79-80.

[19] World Bank, "Gender-differentiated impacts of pension reform", in PREM Notes: Gender, No. 85, April 2004, p. 1.

[20] Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development-Development Assistance Committee secretariat, "Aid to support gender equality, 2001-2005", January 2007.

17. In its discussion of resources for gender equality from domestic and external sources, the *World Survey* will be guided by the outcome of the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-second session on "Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women".

18. The *World Survey* will focus on women's access to labour markets and decent work. While women's access to employment opportunities has increased in recent years, women are more likely than men to have low-productivity, low-paid and vulnerable jobs, with no social protection, basic rights or voice at work.[21] Globally, there also has been a shift in the areas of employment of women, from agriculture towards services. In 2007, 46.3 per cent of women worked in the services sector, as opposed to 36.1 per cent in agriculture, which 10 years ago was the main source of employment for women.[22]

19. The *World Survey* will focus on women's employment in both the formal and informal sectors and will address women's unpaid work. Obstacles faced by women entrepreneurs, such as complicated procedures for business start-ups and limited access to capital, will be discussed. Within informal employment, women are more likely than men to work as own-account workers, domestic workers and unpaid workers in family enterprises.[23] While globally the share of vulnerable employment — the contributing family workers or own-account workers — decreased from 56.1 per cent in 1997 to 51.7 per cent in 2007, the vulnerable share is still larger for women than for men, especially in the world's poorest regions.[22] The potential impact of social and legal protection measures on women in informal employment will be explored.

20. Care work, which includes both direct and indirect care of persons, as well as supportive services such as cleaning and cooking, contributes to the development of human capabilities and to economic growth.[24] Women continue to bear the responsibility of unpaid care work, which includes managing a household, cooking, cleaning, collecting fuel and water and caring for family members.[25] Unpaid care work affects women's ability to undertake paid work, as well as the type, duration and location of their work, and may force them to turn to vulnerable and informal employment.[26] The HIV/AIDS pandemic further increases the burden of unpaid care work on women and girls, as responsibilities for care of family members living with HIV fall disproportionately on them.[27] Both informal sector employment and unpaid care work are excluded from the gross national product.[25] Policy responses to care work include provision of care services, primary education and health services, social protection measures and parental leave provisions.[28] Social protection measures, including health insurance, unemployment insurance and pension funds, play a crucial role in providing support for the costs of family care responsibilities

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[21] ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Women 2008*, p. 1.

[22] Ibid., p. 3.

[23] UNIFEM, *Progress of the World's Women 2005: Women, Work and Poverty*, 2005, p. 44.

[24] EGM/ESOR/2008/BP.3, paper prepared by UNRISD, pp. 5 and 31.

[25] Diane Elson, "Gender budget initiative: background papers", Commonwealth Secretariat, 1999, p. 4.

[26] EGM/ESOR/2008/BP.2, paper prepared by ILO.

[27] Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, UNFPA and UNIFEM, *Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis*, 2004, p. 31.

[28] EGM/ESOR/2008/BP.3, op. cit., pp. 3-4.

by insuring against health-care costs, disability, unemployment and loss of income in old age.[29]

21. The *World Survey* will explore the manner in which policies, legislation and other measures can address women's unpaid care work, including through promoting equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men in public and private life. In this respect, the *World Survey* will be guided by the outcome of the fifty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women on "The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS".

22. The role of the private sector in women's economic empowerment, including through increasing women's participation in corporate boards, developing family-friendly policies and providing social protection measures such as leaves and flexible working arrangements, will also be explored. Family-friendly policies and voluntary codes of conduct with built-in monitoring and verification systems have been introduced by some employers in the private sector to ensure workers' rights in this respect; the benefits have included improvements in overall business productivity.[30]

23. Women's access to land and other resources and assets, including through inheritance, markets and legislation, will be explored. Land ownership, for example, has direct economic benefits as a source of income, as a key input for production and as collateral for credit.[31] Although some progress has been made through legislative reform to secure women's access to land and assets, effective implementation of legislative reforms is hindered by obstacles such as stereotypical attitudes, sociocultural practices and lack of political will and resources.[32] Women's access to common resources and public goods and services will also be addressed. Given that two thirds of the female labour force in developing economies is estimated to be engaged in agricultural activities,[33] particular attention will be paid to women's access to agricultural inputs, technology, infrastructure and extension services.

24. Research on women's access to financial services has focused mainly on microfinance — banking and financial services targeted to low-income women clients. The *World Survey* will focus on women's access to all financial services, including savings, insurance, remittance transfers and credit, which is essential for women to fully benefit from economic opportunities. Both the positive and negative aspects of microcredit will be examined, since research in some areas has led to a debate on whether all microcredit programmes contribute to the empowerment of women. Reviews of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action undertaken in 2000 and 2005 demonstrated some of the positive impacts of microcredit for women's empowerment, while acknowledging the limited coverage

[29] EGM/ESOR/2008/BP.2, op. cit., p. 13.

[30] ILO, *Breaking through the glass ceiling: Women in management: Update 2004*, p. 18.

[31] UNDP, 2008, op. cit., p. 75.

[32] UN-Habitat, "Policy makers guide to women's land, property and housing rights across the world", 2007.

[33] *Women 2000 and Beyond: Rural Women in a Changing World: Opportunities and Challenges*, United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

and amount of credit available to women.[34] While women constitute the majority of the poorest clients of microcredit institutions,[35] they generally receive a smaller amount of money than men.[36] The impact on women's empowerment has been shown to be limited in programmes where women's economic contribution to the household substitutes for that of men, or where women's workloads are increased.[37] The *World Survey* will consider ways in which gender perspectives can be incorporated into the design, implementation and monitoring of microfinance products, including microcredit programmes, to ensure that they are empowering for women.

25. The *World Survey* will address conceptual and methodological issues related to the measurement of women's economic empowerment, in order to identify gaps and challenges, inform the development of gender-sensitive policies and programmes, and systematically and effectively monitor progress in women's economic empowerment.

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[34] E/CN.6/2000/PC/2 and Corr.2 and 3 and E/CN.6/2005/2 and Corr.1.

[35] Sam Daley-Harris, *State of the Microcredit Summit Campaign Report 2005*, p. 24.

[36] Susy Cheston and Lisa Kuhn, "Empowering women through microfinance", 2002, paper commissioned by the Microcredit Summit Campaign, p. 4.

[37] Linda Mayoux, "Microfinance and women's empowerment: rethinking 'best practice'", *Development Bulletin*, No. 57, 2002, p. 76.